

District Elementary Enrollment Committee  
Inter-Lakes School District  
SAU Building, Meredith  
August 17, 2005  
3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Present: Steve Kelley, Richard Hanson, Phil McCormack, Peter Miller, Juli Hird, John Hansen, Ms. Paine.

Also present: Carol Bewley, Susan Mitchell, Ben Shambaugh, Tammy Smart, Jack Carty, Jon Martin.

Meeting called to order at 3:15 p.m.

Public input: None

Review of minutes: No changes

Dr. McCormack asked those present if they had any questions or concerns. Mr. Hanson asked about the Sandwich select board's point of view regarding a special village district.

Mr. Bewley noted that the Select Board has discussed a special village district but at this point does not feel that is necessarily the solution. Mr. Shambaugh noted that the Select Board is not clear if the Bridgewater-Hebron model would work in Sandwich. There was discussion about what areas of governance of the school would fall to the Special Village District and it was thought by Dr. McCormack that the Special Village District would only raise funds and that the Inter-Lakes School Board would continue to operate the school. Mr. Shambaugh noted that the Bridgewater-Hebron Special District was for the purpose of raising capitol funds (building construction) and that the Town's counsel thinks that it might be a problem to raise operating funds using the Special Village District model. There seems to be two schools of thought between the attorneys for the town and school district.

Dr. McCormack noted a critical part of the previous recommendation to the School Board focused on a multi-age solution both for the current school year and perhaps in subsequent years. At the last meeting, the group indicated a desire to discuss more about the multi-age solutions.

Ms. Hird presented some thoughts on multi-age and passed out a sheet with some possible scenarios. Her scenario depicted four "core" teachers and one more who would cover "overflow" scenarios.

Dr. McCormack noted a concern with alignment of multi-age curriculum with state NECAP testing. He wondered if it could put our students at a disadvantage by testing them on something that has not yet been introduced.

Ms. Paine asked what other multi-age programs in the state are doing to address the State testing issue. No one knew at this point in time.

Dr. Kelley asked about how the NECAP results are reported for small classes. Mr. Hansen said that the state takes multiple years of results and combines them to create a statistically valid sample.

Mr. Hansen asked that the committee consider a bigger picture question of whether multi-age is a valid philosophy to follow in Sandwich. Mr. Miller asked what was the general feeling of the public and the staff regarding multi-age? He thought that people were mostly comfortable with the idea. Mr. Hansen noted that multi-age was not necessarily a direction people wanted to go in, but perhaps could rationally see it as a necessary evil to address small class size. Mr. Hansen stated that he had heard more concerns from parents after the decision was made to combine K-1.

Mr. Hanson noted that over the past year of committee meetings we have learned about the differences between multi-grade and multi-age. We have learned of some challenges and some benefits of multi-age.

Dr. McCormack said that he thought that the committee was also looking for the Board to make a commitment to supporting the multi-age model if that was what was recommended. He also noted that he has some concerns with the multi-age model at higher grade levels.

Mr. Miller asked how much of the state test measures aptitude verses achievement. Both Dr. McCormack and Dr. Kelley thought that it was supposed to test achievement, but seemed to measure aptitude more, though they couldn't state this unequivocally. Dr. Kelley did not think the State testing concerns would be a huge issue. Ms. Hird had concerns more with the thematically based questions in social studies and science.

Dr. Kelley wanted to know what we need to do now? Where do go from here?

Ms. Paine expressed concern about where we will be two years from now. She asked whether we would be able to redefine the enrollment trigger that is currently in Board policy. The committee is supposed to be looking at a long-term solution – where will we be in two or three years? Ms. Paine asked whether one of our recommendations for the long term should be to recommend closure of the school.

Mr. Miller noted that at a previous meeting that he suggested we not engage in thinking about catastrophic enrollment loss. There may come a day when that needs to be addressed, but it is not productive to our discussion at this time.

Mr. Miller noted that the multi-age approach is very flexible with dealing with changing numbers of pupils. Also, Sandwich needs to decide what it is willing to pay into the equation.

Mr. Hanson thinks this committee should be able to come up with a recommendation to the Board regarding the numbers that will trigger different scenarios.

Mr. Hansen noted his concern that there need to be triggers in regard to maximum class size in a multi-age situation, which may be different than the trigger for a single grade class.

Mr. Shambaugh asked Dr. McCormack about his skepticism about multi-age in the higher grades. He wondered if that skepticism is there, then the committee does need to consider triggers.

Dr. McCormack said he had worked in districts with upper grade multi-age. He is not sure it is fair to a teacher to have a grade 5/6 multi-age with State expectations of particular curriculum at each grade level.

Ms. Hird noted that she would not want to see the school fragmented by having part of the school be multi-age and part single grade.

Ms. Paine inquired what the class size limit should be for a multi-age class.

Mr. Hansen expressed concern that both low and high enrollment triggers can be set off and that the Board must adopt one philosophy and stick with it. Dr. Kelley stated that if the school goes to multi-age, then it's a package deal. There are curricular, training, and staffing commitments that must be maintained. Dr. McCormack believes that the Board is being driven by the educational interests of all the children of the District.

Mr. Miller noted that if Sandwich does not go to multi-age philosophy, then it will have to operate with a single grade philosophy. He does not see much support for multi-grade. It seems that we are being redundant with today's discussion.

Dr. McCormack said the one thing he doesn't think we have addressed, is multi-age at grades three through six. Is multi-age a viable model given where we are and the State's expectations? Can we develop a program that is equally effective for grades three to six?

Mr. Hansen was asked to share the projected class sizes for the 2005-06 school year. He reported the current projections as:

- Multi-age K/1=19,
- Grade 2=10,
- Grade 3=11,
- Grade 4=10,
- Grade 5=11,
- Grade 6=15,
- Total of 76.

Dr. McCormack wondered if the multi-age was the choice, you wouldn't want to implement it all at once. Ms. Hird disagreed stating that if this was the direction of the District Elementary Enrollment Committee

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school, it would be better to have the whole school changing over all at once. She further noted her belief that in addition to one teacher for each multi-age class, there would need to be one additional teacher for the entire school. This teacher would work with reading and math, especially in larger multi-age classes.

Mr. Hanson was concerned that any decisions not disregard the feelings of the staff and community. Decisions that come from below seem to work better than the ones that come from on high.

Dr. McCormack thought that we need to look at multi-age or single grade.

Ms. Paine commented that Ms. Hird's scenario does not result in less staff. We would be making a huge philosophical shift without a large change in staff. Potentially, if we institute best practice, this idea might not result in any savings.

Mr. Hansen asked about fairness and equity when SCS has class sizes of 20 or 21 with few of the same services available at ILES. How is this equitable when ILES has 16-17 students in a class with more support services?

Dr. McCormack feels that it is an administrative and Board prerogative to decide at what point a class is too big or too small. There are too many variables to be considered.

Mr. Miller said that he thought the Sandwich community is going to want to know something very specific as to how the Special Village District would work. How is a staffing norm defined? Without knowing this, Sandwich residents can't know what a Special Village District would cost them.

Mr. Martin noted that the DEEC is blurring the lines between Special Village District and multi-age. He said that he and others don't know what multi-age looks like. He would like to see the committee stay focused on multi-age and let residents know what multi-age would look like in the school. What would the staffing be? What would the grade arrangement be?

Dr. McCormack said that if the administration thought it was in the best educational interests of the District's children to go to a multi-age configuration, then that recommendation would be made separate of whether there should also be an extra teacher.

Ms. Hird commented that a maximum class size policy for multi-age needs to be established.

Mr. Miller thinks things have gotten confused. It doesn't matter which educational model is used. It has to do with equitability within the District. If the average class size of classes in Meredith is 20 and the average class size in SCS is 10, then people in Meredith are going to wonder why you can't create something that is more equitable.

The need for a Special Village District is so that what each community is paying is equitable. The real issue is equity and harmony within the District.

Mr. Shambaugh asked if one of the purposes of this discussion about multi-age is to change the ratio of students to teacher in Sandwich. If this is adopted, hasn't that addressed this inequity?

Mr. Hanson said he thinks there is recognition on the part of some of us that it isn't appropriate to go to multi-age for enrollment reasons – it needs to be for good, sound pedagogical reasons. The DEEC and District may go that way, Mr. Hanson noted, but he is not convinced that all the promised savings will happen. He doesn't know.

Ms. Hird said that by going to multi-age might not save much money, but the class sizes will be comparable. This will make it more palatable for the community.

Public Input: Mr. Carty noted that in terms of what the DEEC is trying to do, equitability is key. People from one town going to one school have a hard time understanding why class sizes are so different. The numbers noted could be changed rapidly due to people moving in and out of town. In terms of trigger, he doesn't think the DEEC can come up with a trigger. If you are able to arrive at the sixth grade and receive a comparable education, then I would suggest that you use flexibility to deal with it. If you are able to philosophically adopt the multi-age model, then you would be able to cope with the dynamics as they actually occur, not as they hypothetically occur. Mr. Carty noted he has letters from Sandwich residents who went through the school in a multi-age class and that they loved it. Mr. Carty did not think that the DEEC could make a recommendation to the Board in which "one size fits all". It needed to have flexibility.

Mr. Martin was concerned with any model that wasn't consistent. If we're looking at a multi-age, I would rather we take Ms. Hird's recommendation to have the one staff member that can float and deal with extra needs and "bubbles". When talking about pedagogy, we can't treat everyone as having the same abilities. My concern is taking a look of the pedagogical efficacy over a student's whole school career. Mr. Martin also questioned why people are not considering the studies that show that smaller class sizes produce better results. Residents of the district can send their children to any school, including the school with small class sizes. Fair does not always mean equitable.

Ms. Paine wanted to know if at the next meeting there could be information on best practices on staffing, and also whether there can be information on testing in a multi-age environment.

Next meeting will be Wednesday, September 14 from 3:30 to 5:30 at the Humiston Building in Meredith.

Plus/Delta: Dr. Kelley is ready to address in detail information such as what Ms. Hird brought to the meeting. He felt there was some redundancy to the meeting. Mr. Hanson does not necessarily feel clearer or closer to something. He needs more information. Dr.

McCormack felt that questions got answered, but also this caused some loss of focus. Ms. Paine feels like the process is narrowing in a way that she is not completely clear about. She thinks it feels as if we moved a long way quickly from single grade to multi-age. Answering the equity issue may be the unstated goal of the committee. Mr. Miller felt the focus of the meeting bounced around a bit, but that has to happen to make progress. Ms. Hird is glad that we having the multi-age conversation again. Mr. Hansen thanked Ms. Paine for her service on the committee. Mr. Hansen also appreciated the focus on multi-age.

Meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
John Hansen